

## The Safety Sixth Sense

By SFC Lydia R. Mead

**B**anks have sophisticated alarm systems; some are silent, others sound a deafening siren warning of the danger; all for the purpose of protecting the banks' resources. NCOs also have an alarm to protect their most valuable assets — soldiers and equipment. However, many NCOs don't know how to activate that alarm system, which is often referred to as the "sixth sense of safety."

As NCOs, we're charged with the health and welfare of those we lead. Although this may seem like an enormous responsibility, NCOES has provided us with the tools to hone our skills to protect our soldiers. Through Primary Leadership Development, Basic NCO, Advanced NCO, First Sergeant and Sergeants Major courses, we've learned to accept our obligations to lead, train, maintain and care for soldiers and equipment. We'll require those very same skills in protecting the force.

Leading by example and enforcing standards results in a team we can depend on and trust. Our safety sense grows as we make ourselves more aware of setting the example for others. If we take short cuts, avoid protective equipment and perform in an unsafe manner, so will our soldiers.

Doing our job effectively means never walking past a mistake. What greater error is there than an unsafe act? It's directed in AR 385-10 that any unsafe act will be stopped immediately and reported to the supervisor or first line leader. Witnessing an unsafe act should trigger our silent alarm and activate the warning system.

Knowing the standards, not accepting any less and teaching those standards is how we must train. How can we enforce discipline on the battlefield if we don't enforce compliance in training? Prepared for battle means responses must be appropriate and automatic. This takes realistic and precise training. Only perfect practice makes perfect; if we practice incorrectly, we simply have "perfect errors."

According to FM 22-102, "...safety awareness should become a 'sixth sense' as soldiers execute realistic training." In the past, safety has been an add-on measure that seemed intent on putting a halt to this realistic and effective training. In fact, it's an integral part of training because we perform as we train. As stated in FM 25-101, "Ensuring realistic training is safe instills the awareness that will save lives in combat".

To ensure peak performance, we must enforce the standards in Preventive Maintenance Checks and Schedules (PMCS) through refresher training—for the body through physical training, as well as for equipment. The focus of this maintenance must be on the entire system.

What does it really take to activate our sixth sense? If we are to properly guide, lead, and train our soldiers, I believe the key is knowing them.

In addition to knowing their administrative and technical knowledge we must know them personally, which gives greater insight into their reactions to different situations.

Forseeing a possible response to an event allows us to design the necessary strategy to guarantee no accidents or injuries.

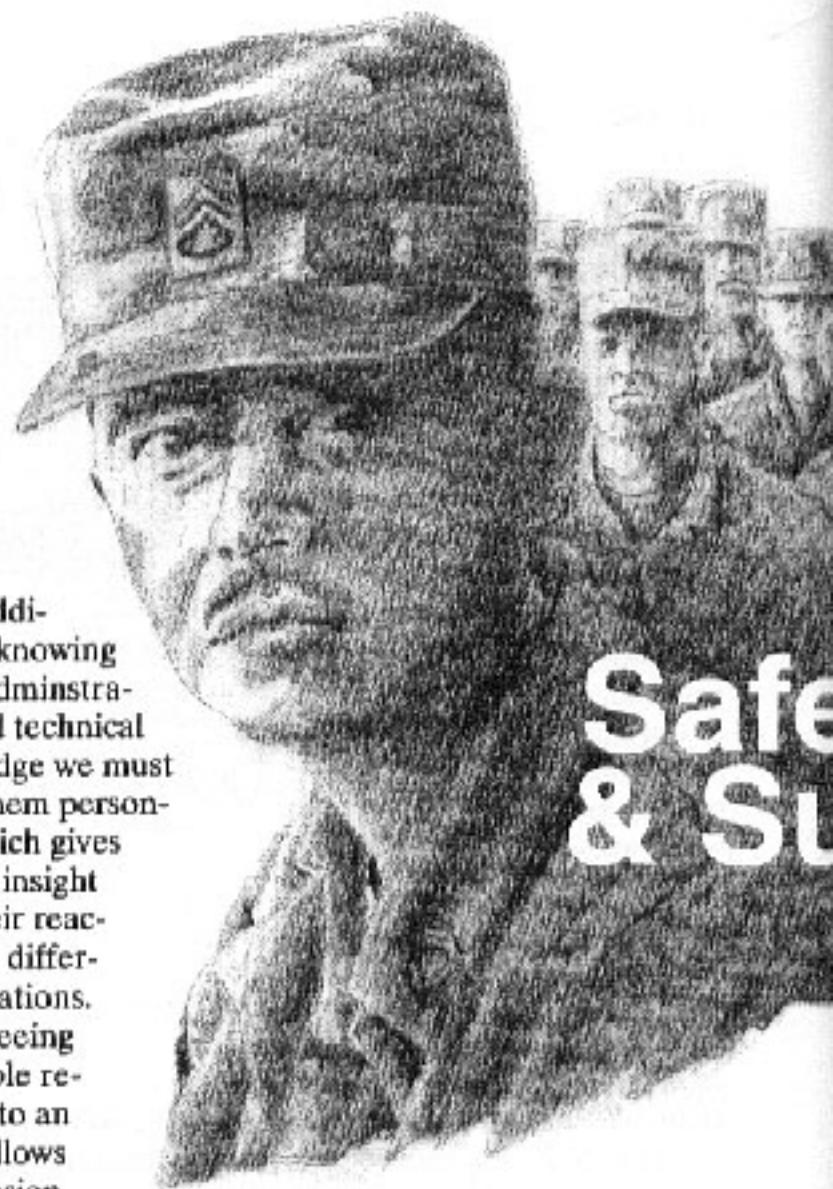
Do you remember the soldier who was a heat casualty during the last field exercise? Is he/she likely to have another? When scheduling the first series of convoy drivers, do you think about the soldier with the newborn that "hasn't had a night's rest in weeks"? What about the soldier returned to duty after a visit from the dentist or doctor who might be on medication that doesn't allow operation of heavy or mechanical equipment? What about the soldier who just returned from a relative's funeral?

If you believe you can't possibly think of all these things, don't worry. It gets easier as you follow the steps to activating your sixth sense of safety. One of those steps is to implement *risk assessment*—part of the risk management program. As you make this a regular part of your operations, you sharpen your awareness to any warning signals.

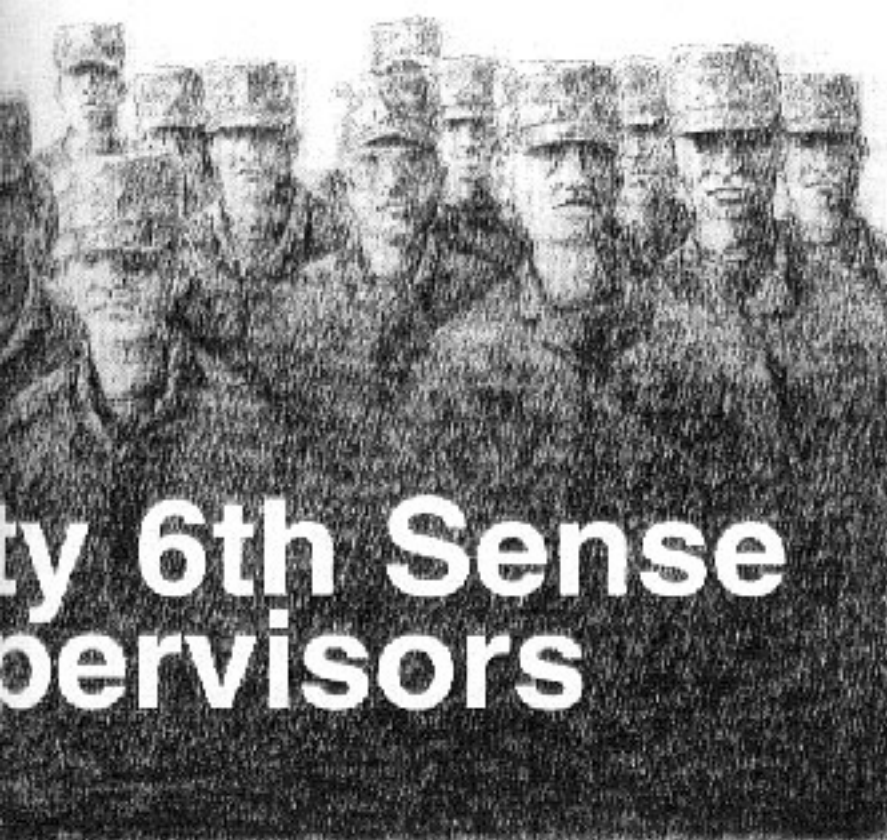
Risk assessment is nothing more than caring for the soldiers we trust to perform at our side. It's common to throw a safety net over the family we care about. However, caring goes along with our performance as NCOs. It's one of the qualities that makes us valuable to our soldiers.

Mastering the skill of sniffing out dangers, hearing and heeding warnings and envisioning countermeasures to successfully complete our mission helps us fine tune that "sixth sense of safety." When we can lead our soldiers toward safe peak performance, we can then feel confident we've done our jobs as NCOs.

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# ty 6th Sense Supervisors

## Supervisors and Safety

SFC Todd E. Duncan

**"I**t can't happen to me!" How often do we hear this simple statement just before an accident occurs? Noncommissioned officers are tasked with mission accomplishment and the welfare of their soldiers. Therefore, supervisor and safety are two words that should be synonymous. However, safety is often a "buzz" word that gets little practical use.

Rapid technological advances within the Army make it imperative that reducing losses and damage control to soldiers and equipment continues at all levels.

According to Army Safety Center reports, in 1985 one in four soldiers was accidentally injured; in 1992 seven in every 1000 soldiers were injured. That costs millions of dollars per year in manpower and equipment and impedes combat readiness.

To control this kind of loss, the application of sound management principles will assist in the prevention of loss or damage to our soldiers and equipment.

The first step in a sound safety program is in stating policy. Each level of command formulates their own guidelines. The Army alone has fewer than 27 safety regulations. This doesn't include policy letters, directives, OSHA regulations and the countless other publications offering guidance and instruction. All this places the burden of interpretation and implementation on the first line supervisor (sergeants). Generally, soldiers respond to the attitudes of their sergeants, not what the commander believes.

A good safety indoctrination program for new soldiers can do wonders for the unit's safety record. Generally, there are two major causes of accidents involving new soldiers—lack of training and over-anxiety (the desire to make a good impression). Initial safety briefings along with continuous fol-

low through and training, can help eliminate both problems. Emphasizing the "why" aspect of rules results in a more cooperative attitude. Soldiers are more inclined to follow the rules when the need is more clearly understood.

An initial safety briefing should include, but isn't limited to, the following:

- ☐ Emphasize preventing accidents in command policy and guidance.
- ☐ Task instructions including applicable safety considerations.
- ☐ Forbid operation of any equipment without specific authorization and qualifications.
- ☐ Notify chain-of-command immediately of any recognized hazards.
- ☐ Inspect equipment and tools prior to use. Deadlining defective equipment.
- ☐ Wear personal protective equipment as required.
- ☐ Report injuries, no matter how slight, immediately to the supervisor.

Question anything you have uncertainties about.

Brief soldiers prior to their first job assignment. Follow up with a counseling several days later. This allows NCOs to answer questions and discover their soldiers' safety attitudes.

Reinforce the initial safety brief through continued education and training. Good supervisors train their soldiers to run a section/shop effectively and safely whether they are present or not.

On-the-spot safety inspections and risk assessments by supervisors is an effective way to monitor, locate, report and correct potential hazards before an accident happens. A planned inspection is periodic and organized and follows procedures which involves unit safety NCOs and supervisors at all levels. This appraisal helps determine needed improvements. Leaders use a continuous informal assessment in their day-to-day operations to ensure all safety aspects of the unit are covered.

NCOs must be able to identify the accident-prone soldier—the one who's tired, stressed out, sick, untrained, etc. This soldier is like a truck with bad brakes.

NCOs and their soldiers will benefit from a solid safety program that is always informative, continuous and committed to soldier welfare and combat readiness. Those benefits will come in the wake of increased soldier morale and their belief that safety is important—to them and the unit.

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